

The Politics of Caregiving for Identity: Lessons for Truth and Reconciliation

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Abstract

The Indian Residential Schools (IRS) system illuminates the political significance of caregiving for identity. Just as the system disrupted familial and community patterns of caregiving to advance colonial objectives, so many Aboriginal parents today strive to organize their 'private' caregiving to resist denigrating public stereotypes and to foster community development. The struggles many parents report to integrate this political activity into their caregiving illuminates the intergenerational harm inflicted on Aboriginal communities by the IRS system. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission risks obfuscating this harm because it limits its scope primarily to the experiences of individuals who attended Residential Schools.

The Politics of Caregiving for Identity: Lessons for Truth and Reconciliation

It is imperative to understand the political significance of caregiving for identity in order to appreciate fully the Indian Residential Schools (IRS) system in Canada, and its legacy. The “traditional” understanding, as labeled by Scott Trevithick (1998) in his literature review, implies that Canadian governments benignly intended the Schools to assimilate Aboriginal children in their best interest, while the “revisionist” understanding maintains the Schools were central to an aggressive strategy to eliminate Aboriginal cultures in Canada. Regardless of which view one favors, both make clear that governments organized caregiving to function as a colonial mechanism. This consensus is evident in Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s (2008) formal apology for the IRS system on June 11, 2008. As he explains, “Two primary objectives of the Residential Schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, ‘to kill the Indian in the child’.”

The forcible disruption of familial and community patterns of caregiving in favour of state sanctioned Residential Schools proved such a potent mechanism for colonialism that many now recognize it is intelligible to speak of the Schools as a system of cultural genocide (eg. Chrisjohn & Young, 2006; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003; van Krieken, 2004). Against this historical backdrop, we argue that it is necessary to hone our attention on the politics of caregiving in order to understand adequately the contemporary reach of the IRS system. We develop this line of analysis below in part to inform the still nascent (at time of writing) IRS Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Canada.

Feminist political economists study caregiving in part to illuminate the “social reproduction” involved in sustaining labour supply, taxation and other public goods (for example, Bezanson & Luxton, 2006). It is commonly said that social reproductive work includes the provision and preparation of food, clothing, shelter, basic health, safety and psychological nurturance for dependent children, the ill, aged, disabled, as well as other less dependent adults, even oneself. Since so much of this activity routinely occurs in ‘private’ domestic spheres, the literature generally discounts informal caregiving as an act of political citizenship (eg. Lister, 2000). There are, however, notable exceptions to this position, including Raia Prokhovnik (1998), John Hoffman (2004), Paul Kershaw (2005) and most recently, with some reservations, Ruth Lister (2007).

Our argument is informed by these exceptions, and provides further evidence that some informal caregiving should be interpreted as the political work of citizens. We maintain that scholars will better appreciate the political nature of caregiving by examining this issue from an indigenous epistemology to which Thomas King refers in his 2003 Massey Lectures. According to King (2003, 2), “The truth about stories is that’s all we are.” We explore this insight by showcasing the expertise of Aboriginal parents who reveal that when caregiving fosters individual agency, it is importantly about story-telling: stories to resist; stories to ensure cultural continuity; and stories to promote community development. The contribution of caregiving to these political activities is in turn critical for understanding the meaning that Aboriginals ascribe to the legacy of the IRS system. Thus, while the TRC (2008b, 2) will rightly concern itself with compensation, education and other public issues to which the class action IRS Settlement Agreement refers, we urge the Commission and its stakeholders to be equally mindful of the political significance of ‘private’ caregiving. For just as the politics of care were used to advance colonial objectives, so these politics must also guide any adequate plan of restitution.

To forestall misinterpretation, our emphasis on ‘private’ care does not align our analysis with a neoliberal predilection to privatize responsibility to individual homes, communities or the voluntary sector for either social well-being generally, or reconciliation specifically. Readers will find instead that our evidence supports the call for substantial public redistribution in response to the abuse that was inflicted on

individuals, communities and Peoples by the IRS system, in large part because it obstructed caregiving practices. Although “healing” is a dominant refrain in the Prime Minister’s apology and the TRC mandate (2008a), our focus on caregiving does not voice a medicalized interpretation of the IRS legacy. While many survivors indeed strive to heal, we present care as a political concept that is cautious about a discourse that risks implying victims need therapy more so than justice (see Chrisjohn & Young, 2006).

We develop the article in five sections. The first describes the methodology of the Care, Identity and Inclusion project, the source of our data. The second section shows that Aboriginal parents organize their child caregiving to resist denigrating public images and to promote community development beyond the household boundaries in which it is performed. Given the political implications of such ‘private’ caregiving, we discuss in section three the need for the TRC to frame the IRS system explicitly as an intergenerational assault rather than limit its scope primarily to the experiences of former students, as it currently does. We in turn suggest some policy and program implications of this alternative frame. In the final two sections, we alert readers to challenges that inhere in cultural revitalization. One occurs *within* Aboriginal communities because caregivers acknowledge there is tension about what constitutes Aboriginality, particularly as it relates to the place of Christianity. The other speaks directly to the mandate of the TRC. Despite aiming for reconciliation *between* Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal citizens, the latter must anticipate that many who self-identify as Aboriginal aspire for immersion in their cultural communities over inclusion in ‘Canada’ at this historical juncture.

Method

Given King’s observation that “the truth about stories is that’s all we are,” we privilege qualitative, narrative data to inform our argument. The study on which we report was organized to feature the expertise of twenty Aboriginal mothers by creating intellectual space for them to tell their stories (for a related methodological emphasis on stories, see also Kenny, 2006). They do so as part of the Care, Identity and Inclusion project, an initiative that invites academics from two Canadian universities to examine social inclusion for children and families from the perspectives of minority ethnocultural groups. The project is designed to be citizen-led and to foster local capacity by partnering with the program HIPPY, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters, along with its counterpart, Aboriginal HIPPY. Both programs organize around the principle that facilitating the caregiver-child bond within the family home is a powerful intervention for increasing parental agency and child success. Aboriginal HIPPY is attuned further to the ways in which caregiver-child time can contribute toward cultural revitalization. In collaboration with these community partners, the academic principal investigator successfully applied for \$740,000 in research funds from the Government of Canada’s Social Development Partnerships Program. This funding was allocated directly to the HIPPY and Aboriginal HIPPY partners for their Directors to manage over the Project’s three-year duration. In contrast to the colonizing practices implicit in so much scholarship, the decision to empower the programs with fiduciary responsibility aimed to mitigate the power differentials that typically favour university partners when collaborating with communities, and to ensure that the research progressed with due concern for the priorities of community members.

Although it targets lower-income families internationally, HIPPY has proven more popular in Canada with recent immigrants and Aboriginal communities. Among the latter, Aboriginal organizers reflected at some length upon the value of integrating a program that evolved from a non-Aboriginal context. After careful deliberation, organizers elected to modify the curriculum to feature stories germane in their First Nations, and to rename the program so that Aboriginal precedes HIPPY. The home visitors who work on behalf of Aboriginal HIPPY are members of First Nations, typically from the local community. By contrast, all HIPPY home visitors are immigrant women of color, who generally share an ethnocultural and linguistic heritage with program parents, often to facilitate their participation in a language other than English. Home visitors in both programs meet weekly during the school year with participant families to enhance the opportunities, skills and comfort-level that parents require to nurture their relationships with

their children, and in the case of Aboriginal HIPPY, with attention to the legacy of Indian Residential Schools.

The academic partners engaged home visitors to serve as community researchers in four Aboriginal communities in the lower mainland of British Columbia (BC), as well as among immigrant populations in Vancouver, BC and Toronto, Ontario, two of Canada's three largest cities. Seven home visitors serve alongside the university partners on an Executive Committee, including two members of First Nations. The initial year of the project included the seven home visitors on the Executive and another three of their colleagues (two from First Nations) in a process of journaling through which they explored the terms care, identity, and inclusion. Guided by input from Aboriginal Executive members, the home visitors elected to write initially in response to the question: Do you or your children have to compromise part of your identity to feel included? Why or why not? Every two weeks for a three month period thereafter, the ten home visitors submitted journal entries by email to the principal academic investigator who would analyze them and respond with individually tailored questions that invited further exploration of themes raised in each writer's previous submission, while also including common questions for all journal participants. Common questions included: How important is it that your children know your culture or language? And what, if any, challenges are there to passing down your culture or language? Journaling thus emerged as an iterative, semi-structured, leisurely-paced interview that occurred in writing electronically with each home visitor. The process simultaneously trained home visitors in use of computers, email and word processing, which they would use as interviewers with parents in the next stages of the project.

Influenced by the experienced-based epistemology that is fundamental to many intersectional methodologies (Simien, 2007), university partners in turn used the journal entries as a conceptual framework with which to familiarize home visitors about the associations between caregiving, identity and inclusion to which their own narratives alluded. Their journal entries thus contributed core content around which home visitors were trained to serve as researchers who would interview parents with whom they already administer the HIPPY or Aboriginal HIPPY programs. In addition, sharing journal entries enabled the team to work toward greater inter-interviewer consistency when facilitating semi-structured, qualitative interviews with a purposive sample of another 70 parents, 16 of whom participated in Aboriginal HIPPY. The interviews started in month 13 of the study, and generally occurred twice every six weeks during a single school year. About half of the additional 70 parents were interviewed in year two, with the remaining half interviewed in year three.

The research design capitalized on the trust that home visitors enjoy with parents in order to explore sensitive issues that include experiences of discrimination. Up to thirty minute conversations about care, identity and inclusion were added to the end of two out of every six weekly HIPPY home visits. The initial interview began with the question: Is it important to pass on your cultural identity to your children? Why or why not? Subsequent interviews included questions that responded specifically to observations shared by individual interviewees, but also posed common questions for all participants. These included: What, if anything, would be lost if your child does not learn your culture(s)? Where or with whom do you feel like you belong in Canada? Do you encounter discrimination based on your race or ethnicity? If so, how do you maintain a sense of pride for yourself or your children? In the third year, we also invited interviewees to reflect on observations shared by participants in previous interviews in order to perform a qualitative-validity check of our narrative data.

The majority of the interviews were conducted in a parent's 'first' language, although for Aboriginal participants the language was English, not the language of the First Nation(s) to which they belong. Every six weeks during the school year, the home visitor interviewed the parent in the first week; transcribed the interview in the parent's first language in the second week; re-visited the parent in a third week to verify the transcript and invite additions or revisions; transcribed the second meeting in week four; and, if necessary,

translated both the first and second meetings into English. The final English transcript was sent to the principal academic partner, who read it in order to recommend additional questions for the home visitor to integrate into interviews in the next six weeks of data gathering.

Journals and interviews were analyzed in the light of King's (2003) *The Truth about Stories*, along with the feminist framework for theorizing about motherhood proposed by Collins (1994) who recommends shifting the experiences of minority ethnocultural women to the centre of scholarship. Our focus on mothers in this article reflects only the current gender division of labour, which positions women to be more familiar than men with the diverse aspects of social reproduction to which caregiving contributes. But by illuminating further linkages between caregiving and citizenship, the article adds evidence with which to question why social policy fails to oblige men to share equally with women the citizenship work inherent in caregiving (see also Craig, 2008; Kershaw, 2005, 2006).

While the article is informed by all of the journal and interview data, our arguments feature the stories shared by the twenty Aboriginal participants. They all reside on reserves that fall within or adjacent to urban centres, and 19 live within the colonial boundaries of Metro Vancouver. This purposive sample aims to reflect that 26 percent of those who self-identify as Aboriginal in Canada reside on reserves, and another 53 percent reside in urban settings (Census of Canada, 2008). Consistent with these demographic statistics, our sample consists of individuals who live in and across both contexts.

Caregiving, Story-Telling, Resistance and Pride

In his investigation of the racism experienced by Aborigines in Australia, David Mellor (2003) argues that research too regularly overlooks the perspectives of victims. The received view, he suggests, is that contemporary racism is more subtle and symbolic in nature than it was in the past; and scholarly focus on this alleged subtlety risks implying that racism is less common in frequency or scope. By contrast, Mellor's qualitative data reveal that Aborigines report racism is "pervasive" (482).

The CII data illuminate a similar reality in the lower mainland of BC. Aboriginal participants report that their parenting occurs in a context infused with racism. For instance, Mary explains that "Every day" she fears her children will encounter discrimination:

Interviewer: Is [racism] as strong today as it was when you were a child?

Mary: Not as apparent but it is still there and maybe that is worse... I don't think you realize it right away... (long pause). You see it years later, maybe you pretend it is not so...and then as you become a parent you say, I will not let that happen to my children.

The Care, Identity and Inclusion project pushes beyond Mellor's analysis to explore some of the strategies by which Aboriginals respond to racism. In their capacities as mothers, our participants report that story-telling is a key nurturing mechanism by which they resist. Jenny, for instance, explains:

On the last occasion that my daughter met racism, we talked about our Grandmother. We talked about what she lived through, the changes in lifestyle, the pain, the torture, the survivance... If I had to summarize how I handle these situations, it would revolve around dialogue with my children, truly open dialogue, often met with tears and then a game plan for the next time the attack occurs, and of course... a way to release the false belief that was slightly ingrained in our heads because of the racism.

The Aboriginal mothers in turn share that they derive tremendous pride from rearing their children in a manner that prioritizes cultural continuity across generations. As Rebecca recounts, "I am proud. I am proud to pass down my culture. I want more. I want to make up for years of being separated or maybe even ashamed of who I am... I feel ashamed that there was a time when I doubted my culture."

One implication of the pride that mothers attribute to their child rearing strategies is that care for cultural identity retention is integral for the parent and child alike to develop the self-esteem that both need to exercise agency in public spaces. Their comments resonate with the work of John Rawls who identified "self-respect" as "the most important primary good" in his seminal publication, *A Theory of Justice* (1971,

440). In his view, self-respect “includes a person’s sense of his own value, his secure conviction that his conception of his good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out,” as well as the “confidence in one’s ability, so far as it is within one’s power, to fulfill one’s intentions.” Without these two qualities, Rawls observes, “nothing may seem worth doing, or if some things have value for us, we lack the will to strive for them.”

Refining Rawls’ observation about self-respect, justice scholars have since explored the relationship between recognition and self-esteem. The work of Axel Honneth (eg. 2004) is particularly noteworthy when he distinguishes between self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem, all of which he argues are at risk when individuals and the groups to which they belong are denied social recognition. It has therefore become widely accepted, as Charles Taylor (1994) states, that “nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.” This position is affirmed even by scholars like Nancy Fraser (eg. Fraser & Honneth, 2003) who argues against over-extending the reach of recognition theory such that it distorts problems of (re)distribution.

Michael Chandler and Christopher Lalonde (1998) have empirically explored the link between cultural continuity and self-esteem by examining suicide rates across Aboriginal communities in BC. Their findings are telling, and alarming. First, they explode the myth that Aboriginal rates of suicide are uniformly higher than the rates among non-Aboriginal Canadians. Instead, Chandler and Lalonde show there is tremendous variability in suicide rates among the 196 Aboriginal bands in BC. Of these, 111 reported no cases of suicide over five years, whereas some communities reported rates that are 800 times the national average. Second, Chandler and Lalonde reveal that the variability associates with community markers of cultural continuity, including: “(a) evidence that particular bands had taken steps to secure aboriginal title to their traditional lands; (b) evidence of having taken back from government agencies certain rights of self-government; evidence of having secured some degree of community control over (c) educational services; (d) police and fire protection services; and (e) health delivery services; and finally, (f) evidence of having established within their communities certain officially recognized ‘cultural facilities’ to help preserve and enrich their cultural lives” (209). Examining these markers, Chandler and Lalonde find a linear pattern: suicide rates declined as Aboriginal communities enjoy more markers of cultural continuity; and those which enjoy all six markers witnessed no suicides over the five year review period.

Notwithstanding the importance of their findings, Chandler and Lalonde lament that their epidemiological analysis is hampered by the dearth of variables available to measure cultural rehabilitation across Aboriginal communities. They therefore suspect that their “collection of marker variables is only a subset of what is undoubtedly a much larger array of such protective factors.” The insights shared above by Mary, Jenny, and Rebecca are consistent with this view because they alert us to a community protective factor that cannot yet be measured quantitatively: namely, child caregiving strategies which empower community members to resist misrecognition by providing children with a positive, counter-narrative about their own culture; one that will serve child and parent alike as a resource when the outside world denigrates their identity (see also Lavell-Harvard & Lavell, 2006). As Tina recalls, “When I was growing up I knew there were a lot of kids who were ashamed from the racist remarks. But if you’re strong with your identity and you’re proud of where you came from, then you’re not going to let narrow minded people get to you.” Accordingly, Tina feels “a HUGE responsibility” as a mother to ensure her “children have a healthy sense of self: personal power, positive self-esteem, positive view of personal future and a sense of purpose” (emphasis in original).

The CII project makes clear that caregiving to resist externally imposed denigrating images is not unique to Aboriginal mothers. It is a political strategy that new immigrant study participants also deploy when they belong to minority ethnocultural groups that are targets of discrimination, particularly Black Canadians and Canadians of Muslim faith. Bibi, for instance, an immigrant originally from Congo captures

this theme eloquently. She explains that: "For me, building my children's identities is as important as providing them food and water because it will help them develop survival strategies."

But just as Aboriginal and immigrant experiences converge to signal the significance of caregiving for cultural identity, so the colonial legacy in Canada, including the IRS system, means that Aboriginal experiences of identity retention are markedly different from that of recent minority ethnocultural immigrants. In contrast to immigrants, all of the Aboriginal women in the study report the challenge involved in learning their culture(s) while simultaneously wishing, and feeling obliged, to teach it to their children. For instance, when asked to comment on the relevance of Bibi's observation to her parenting, Rebecca answers "Well, I would like to get there but I am not sure. Food and water, hey? (laughter) The quote sounds almost biblical, or like a reading from some type of literature. What I mean is that it sounds like this person is advanced in their work. I am trying. But no, I am not there yet."

Interviewer: Can you explain that a bit more?

Rebecca: I am working so hard for my kids to be proud. But it is a tough job. I am recovering from a system that beat us down as a people. So, I do all that I can. My intentions are good. But I feed my kids more than I teach them culture (laughter).

You know what I mean, right? I will get to this one day. But I can only teach what I know, and so many of us here in [Rebecca's community] are just learning the culture. It's so sad and painful. To want to be proud. To want to know. To have to dig.

An Intergenerational Attack

The near poetry with which Rebecca articulates her frustration in struggling, but striving, to learn and teach culture illuminates a key element of the colonial attack imposed by the IRS system, one which risks being overshadowed by the TRC. According to the Commission (2008b, 17), its scope is "primarily centred around the legacy of the childhood experiences of former students." While without exception every Aboriginal CII participant affirms the value of creating safe spaces for former students to describe the abuse they suffered and their efforts to resist, CII mothers also suggest this focus is insufficient. Attending primarily to individual student experiences diverts attention from the relationship between individuals, generational exchanges and social processes that sustain communities over time. The fact that individuals "want to know," but "have to dig" is a tremendous worry to some in Aboriginal communities precisely because members recognize that their seemingly 'private' caregiving can contribute importantly to community development. Jenny alerts scholars to this dynamic explicitly. She maintains that "Caregiving is the grounding force to identity... When we nurture our children in a positive, strong sense of culture, aboriginal culture, the community development is inherent, it is one and the same... When we build identity in the home (caregiving) we build community. And when we build community, we strengthen the power of the whole."

The acuity with which Jenny understands the political connections between familial care, community identity and citizenship in First Nations is evident across many Aboriginal mothers who participate in the CII project (see also Kenny, 2006, 551). Their wisdom reflects in part the unique harm that they and others continue to endure as a result of the IRS system. By relocating children from their familial and community homes, the system purposefully staged an *intergenerational* attack on cultural continuity by disrupting the community development that flows from 'private' care. Therefore, in addition to the emotional, physical and sexual violence many individuals suffered while attending Schools, the Schools also systematically sabotaged students' future desire to share their Aboriginality with successive generations. As Mabel explains, "My dad knows so much [about his Aboriginal culture], but he stopped at a certain age teaching the kids (pause). Each child was stopped at elementary school." When asked why her father stopped, Mabel replies "To protect us, so we would not be targeted, abused or face racism." Thus, while the Government of Canada is presently delivering "common experience" compensation to Residential School attendees, Mabel underscores the need for policy makers to concede also that the

specific targets of those Schools included individuals who would never attend: the children and grandchildren of survivors; the very future of Aboriginal communities. Accordingly, Rebecca asks: "How long will it be until we can talk about the Residential School like it was the past, not a part of the present?"

Notwithstanding that its mandate refers to "intergenerational consequences" (2008a, s. 1(f)), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission risks failing to engage sufficiently with the IRS system's intergenerational assault because it limits its scope primarily around the experiences of students. The CII participants warn against this narrow focus. Only when we place the intergenerational attack on cultural continuity at the centre of our analyses do we appreciate fully the harm that members of Aboriginal communities continue to suffer regardless of whether they attended a Residential School or not. This is a theme that Sylvia Barton and colleagues (2005) regrettably overlook in their study of the quality of life of Residential School survivors in Bella Coola, BC. While they confirm that there are substantial differences in well-being between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations, they find almost no differences in health between Aboriginal survivors of the Residential Schools and Aboriginal community members who did not attend. According to Barton et al., their data provide "evidence contrary to the received view of the devastation of the residential school experience" (295). In contrast, CII participants alert us to an alternative interpretation. Although they acknowledge the specificity of the suffering that School attendees describe, (recall Jenny urging her children to remember their Grandmother), they are adamant that the victims of the IRS system were not exclusively attendees. The system targeted members of Aboriginal communities generally, and over time, because the Schools destabilized the community and cultural continuity to which 'private' caregiving can contribute. The deleterious consequences of the Indian Residential Schools are thus incurred at the population level of the cultural community, not just the individual level. We thus need not anticipate that there will be intra-Aboriginal community differences in health as a result of IRS attendance versus non-attendance.

In Support of 'Digging'

As Canadians embark on our own version of Truth and Reconciliation, it is imperative that we acknowledge what the intergenerational disruption of cultural transmission means for parents and communities: the unique difficulty of learning and teaching cultures *simultaneously*. This difficulty behooves the same government institutions that once established Residential Schools to now allocate as a matter of just restitution substantial public funding directly to First Nations, Inuit and Métis so that members can engage in *self-defined* cultural revitalization. According to Denise, "[Governments of Canada] took this away, our culture, our language. They put us in this position to be so desperate to try and keep a culture alive and breathing. They should create funds. They should invest in our communities. To give back. To make the [Prime Minister's] apology real."

Our analysis so far underscores that 'private' caregiver-child time will be an important mechanism by which self-defined cultural revitalization continues within Aboriginal communities. But given the IRS system's disruptions to cultural continuity, Aboriginal participants affirm that culturally appropriate public activity and public spaces now must also be key sources of support for their individual child-rearing strategies. Specifically, reserves around Vancouver represent for some mothers a place of cultural re-discovery and heightened personal awareness of the cultural retention that many have secured despite Canada's colonial legacy. Key support mechanisms on-reserve include family and parent-child programs that promote cultural vitality, along with child care services that prioritize aboriginal language exposure (Ball & Pence, 2006). The provision of additional public resources for such programs from senior levels of Government is required as part of any just restitution for the IRS system.

However, since three-quarter of Aboriginal citizens do not reside on reserves, policy makers must increasingly contemplate cultural (re)vitalization programs that bring supports off-reserve. Aboriginal HIPPY is one program model that ought to be considered for expansion. As indicated above, this program fosters parent-child time by visiting family homes on- and off-reserve. The outreach model is well-designed

to invite the diversity of Aboriginal parents who reside in urban settings to integrate their particular Aboriginal affiliations into their child caregiving, including time they devote to confronting the implications of the IRS system for their children's future school experiences. In this way, Aboriginal HIPPPY celebrates and strengthens what was historically robbed by the Indian Residential Schools: parent-child time enjoyed in one's self-defined cultural context. Additional public investment to help refurbish the cultural continuity to which this time contributes seems a fitting component of any just compensation from the people of Canada.

A related intervention that merits attention is the narrative process honed by the CII project. It enabled parents to take time in their own homes to tell their stories about caregiving and to explore why it may be important to pass down their cultural identity to their children. Rebecca, for instance, reports about the process that "I like this... talking about who we are, what we believe in, what we want for our kids. We should do more of this, without a cause. Kinda just sit around and share stories." She adds. "If we want to strengthen and/or save our heritage we need to do these things and often. It is not good enough to have one-offs of practicing our culture... [We need to] reach to family, gather listen and talk, share stories. Then the community will fall into place and time." Denise agrees, insisting that "I want to find a way for us to continue this work. I want to talk more about what we need to do, I feel like there is a light now at the end of the tunnel. (pause, tears...) I am scared that we are gonna stop all of this, and it feels like we are so close to finding what is going on inside each of us." Denise's remarks signal that the CII process sparked personal reflections and consciousness-raising which have significance far beyond the data collection. She and other individual study participants in one community have therefore organized opportunities to meet collectively. At the request of participants, the CII Project committed resources to the initial meeting, which included a trained IRS survivor group facilitator.

Proud Pentecostal Indians?

Whatever cultural reproduction strategies Aboriginals select, the CII participants anticipate challenges that receive insufficient attention in the literature. The first occurs *within* Aboriginal communities, because there are differences of opinion about what counts as 'Aboriginal'. As Leslie notes "It's hard to learn about [our culture] cause who do you ask and who's going to be honest, there's different teachings from different people..." These differences are far from trivial, particularly in regards to faith. Rebecca, for instance, is adamant that "I will never understand how our people follow the church after what was done to us?... I think the tension stems from those that were beaten at school and they now follow the white man's way of life. But what do they follow, when or if you interview them? What would they say about culture?... Would they say, 'I want my children to be proud Pentecostal Indians?' And what does that mean?"

Rebecca's question cuts to the core of liberal support for group-differentiated rights. Readers will recall that Will Kymlicka's (1989; 1995) important defense of multicultural citizenship rests on the observation that cultural membership allows for meaningful individual choice. Any aspirations to restrict the spiritual autonomy of minority community members in order to sustain the character or values of that community appear to contradict the very purpose for defending group-differentiated entitlements in the first place. Kymlicka concludes, accordingly, that multicultural citizenship cannot justify intra-community restrictions that conflict within individual civil rights. To illustrate the problem, he refers to the Pueblo theocracy, which curtails religious freedom in order to limit the activities of Protestant community members.

Aboriginal CII participants urge scholars to frame the issue differently, however, to be more attuned to the historical role that the Church played in disrupting Aboriginal cultures. Like Kymlicka, they recognize that culture is dynamic, and that individuals have legitimate aspirations to explore a range of available life paths. Tina, reflecting carefully on Rebecca's comments, explains that she "understand[s] the position being taken;" but she also sympathizes with "those looking for healing in whatever means they can find it." Leslie agrees. Imagining that her children may someday align with the Catholic Church, she remarks that "I would encourage them to be fully aware of the history [of the IRS system] before they made that decision.

But would I ever forbid them?... Say... no you cannot practice the Catholic religion... That's taking away their freedom of choice. I want to raise my daughters to be strong enough to make their own decisions."

While the Aboriginal participants clearly value individual freedoms, Leslie's concern that her children become "fully aware of the history" advances beyond Kymlicka's position by illuminating the pitfalls of an ahistorical analytic frame. The Church, whether Pentacostal, Catholic or otherwise, does not represent one *neutral* life-course option among many from which Leslie's children may choose. The Church functioned explicitly as a mechanism for colonialism and assimilation within Aboriginal communities. Contemporary faith in Christianity among Aboriginals is not obviously an expression of their autonomous selection so much as it may reflect the successful hegemony of an externally enforced faith regime. This regime imposed its will through the unjust relocation of children from their familial and cultural contexts for well over a century, and abused children physically, emotionally and sexually, sometimes as punishment for resisting Church teachings. The influence of Christianity may therefore persist, not so much as a reflection of individual choices, but because its institutions were supported by the Government of Canada to forcibly infiltrate the 'private' care mechanisms that reproduce culture. Listen to Denise: "(silence, tears...) I am certain people in the community are brainwashed or convinced by the Church's ways..." Veronica concurs:

My family is strongly rooted to the Church and all of them were so abused at the residential school. Is that not amazing? They follow the Church that beat them and sexually abused them... They are so convinced that the Church never did wrong. But I guess they need to have faith. So I accept that... But I would hope that one day they come to find inner peace and acknowledge the harm that this place caused.

Veronica and many other CII participants thus welcome the opportunity in Aboriginal communities to reflect collectively on the cultural violence formerly inflicted by churches in order to critically evaluate their present influences over the revitalization of Aboriginal cultures. When we recognize that the IRS system launched an intergenerational assault, we leave open the intellectual space for members of Aboriginal communities to recommend on-reserve limits to Christian practices in order to minimize cultural violence that the Church may continue to perpetrate toward those who aspire for Aboriginal spiritualities as they were experienced before the IRS system. This interpretation is consistent with John Stuart Mill's (1975, 10-11) famous harm principle, which asserts that "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others."

Bonding versus Bridging for Reconciliation

As aboriginal parents and children grapple with the meaning of Aboriginality, many anticipate a second challenge that speaks directly to the mission of the TRC. The reconciliation for which the Commission aspires entails strengthening relationships between Aboriginals and Non-Aboriginals, fostering the "bridging" social capital in which Robert Putnam (2000) has motivated so much interest. One integrative location commonly proposed is the labour market (Richards, 2000). Although employment is clearly important to remedy the disturbing rates of poverty from which Aboriginals disproportionately suffer in Canada, employment success typically means embracing a politics of time that privileges the majority cultural context. Jacqui, for instance, recounts that "Each year my family participates in the longhouse, a season that beholds so much of my culture... Ceremonies are longer than a day. They can run for 18 hours, or three days. This season is a season of travel, a season of labor, and a season of celebration. I can generally attend one or two of the thirty plus celebrations each year. Why? Well, work does not allow me to adjust my schedule to participate in events that are meaningful to me. I call that giving up my identity." Similar risks to personal identity are observed in employment research by Kenny (2006) and Hunter (2000). This evidence invites senior levels of government in Canada to affirm that recognition politics relate far more intimately to work-life balance debates than has typically been acknowledged.

The urgency with which some participants wish to reconcile employment with Aboriginal cultural continuity signals that solid labour market ties with the majority population are necessary given the economic legacy of colonialism. Many simultaneously aspire, however, for there to be political and cultural distance between their cultural communities and 'Canada' per se. Veronica's narrative is telling on this point: "I don't deny that I am Canadian," she says. "But I don't wear it on my sleeve... I say that I come from the Coast Salish people and we are of the [Name removed] First nation... They will say things like, wow where is that? And I will say that we are still in our traditional territory... That is important, to still voice our land base. The government would like us to not claim this. Then it would be forgotten. No, I don't want to be Canadian." Veronica's narrative is echoed by the majority of Aboriginal participants in the CII Project, and is consistent with quantitative results reported by Evelyn Peters (2007, 231). These show that "First Nations and Métis... generally felt less attachment to Canada and to their home provinces than did... the general population."

As the TRC conducts its work, Veronica's disinterest in Canada as a primary context for belonging will alarm many in positions of power. How should the Commission and Canadian policy makers respond? In this case, the divergence between stories shared by Aboriginal and immigrant CII participants is instructive. Many immigrant mothers point to constitutional commitments to multiculturalism as something that allows them to bond with other members of their minority culture. The resulting security they feel to retain their minority identity, along with the respect they perceive that multiculturalism confers to their distinctiveness, in turn positions them to bridge more confidently with others, including the majority cultural group (author, submitted).

But Aboriginal mothers are making a very different argument. They observe that recent generations of Aboriginal citizens have been robbed of the opportunity to bond with one another in a context of cultural security. They now want this opportunity. Listen to Rebecca when she emphasizes that "I want us to be Indian again. Not white, not influenced by white, and not directed by white people." Or listen to Jenny when she insists that "I feel rebellious towards the mainstream, a battle to be different, to disallow the other society to invade my right to be Aboriginal, as it was for my parents and grandparents." Mark Brough and colleagues (2006) report similar sentiments from Indigenous citizens of Australia in their qualitative study of social capital and identity. They conclude that "Policy-makers have at times simplistically seized on the promise of 'fixing' inequality through stimulating the growth of social capital, particularly bridging capital... [But] far from being a 'new' panacea for inequality, the challenge to maintain 'old' bonds while traversing new 'bridges' represents an entrenched daily struggle for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly perhaps those who reside in large heterogeneous cities" (406).

If the experiences shared by immigrants in the CII project are any indication, the disinterest in bridging reported by many Aboriginals may subside as public policy supports, rather than impedes, the care time needed for identity retention between generations. At the very least, the Aboriginal mothers make clear that such caregiving has potential to empower members of their communities to go with confidence into public spaces to contest existing power structures. Particularly when the time is properly resourced financially, 'private' caregiving can so empower because it represents a central context in which Aboriginal parents and community members self-define together through story-telling and story-rejecting. Recall that such care provides the context in which Mary rejects the fear her children risk internalizing because denigrating portrayals of Aboriginality linger in public settings. Recall it is the same context in which Jenny invites her children to emulate the resilience their grandmother showed in the face of the IRS system. And recall that it is the context in which Rebecca aspires to know and continues to dig into the meaning of her cultural identity side-by-side with her children. Their nurturing responses to racism and colonialism – other people's stories about Aboriginals – are quintessential acts of political citizenship because they are organized in part to strengthen the First Nation(s) of which they are members. In this capacity, their caregiving and story-telling are also living testaments to Thomas King's (2003, 29) assertion "It was Sir

Isaac Newton who said, 'To every action there is always opposed an equal reaction.' Had he been a writer, he might have simply said, 'To every action there is a story.'"

So in the narrative style of scholarship modeled by King, we invite you to take Jenny's story, or Rebecca's or Veronica's, or any of the others featured in this article. Do with them what you will. Tell them to friends. To colleagues. Turn them into a TRC recommendation or an undergraduate lecture. Forget about them, as the powerful often do.

But don't say in years to come that you would have taught, governed or even lived your own lives differently, if only you had heard their stories.

You've heard them now.

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